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ABSTRACT

Two lectures on the topic of self-esteem are provided. The purposes of the first lecture are to help parents and professionals better appreciate themselves as support persons and to help them develop and practice skills which will lead to building positive self-esteem both within themselves and others. Five activities are provided to further understanding of how expressions of ordinary language can positively or negatively influence self-esteem. Four ways parents may respond to a parenting situation (nurturing, structuring, inviting dependence, or criticizing) are identified and described. Concluding sections of the first lecture provide guidelines for enhancing the self-esteem of adults and point out characteristics of self-accepting persons. The purpose of the second lecture is to provide seminar participants with an opportunity to consider activities directed toward the development of positive attitudes in children. The importance of significant others at home and in school for the development of children's self-esteem is emphasized. Developing children's awareness of their physical being, emphasizing their strengths, and promoting their awareness of others are among the activities advocated. In conclusion, a list of general suggestions for helping children attain a positive orientation toward themselves, a list of positive support techniques for use by teachers, and a list of activities and events that develop self-awareness and build self-esteem: are provided. (Author/RH)

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Selected Papers

Number 7

Unit for Child Studies

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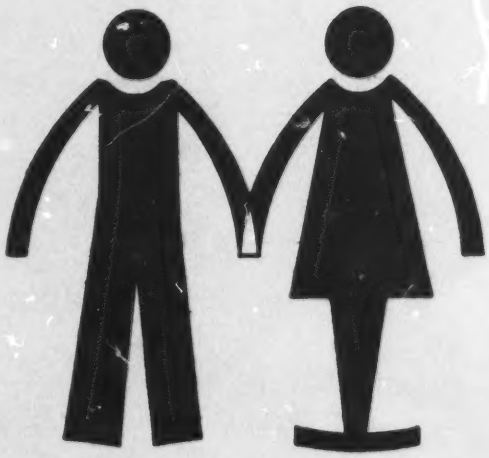

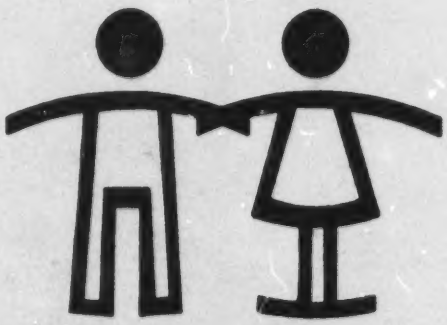

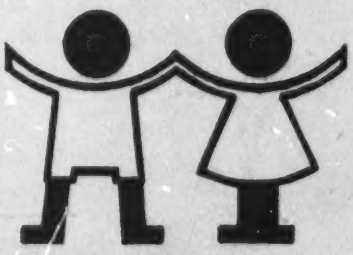

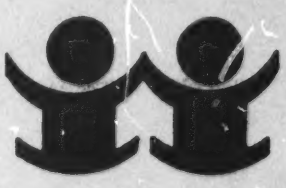

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YOUR CHILD'S SELF ESTEEM and SELF ESTEEM, A FAMILY AFFAIR

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SELF ESTEEM: A FAMILY AFFAIR

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Based on a talk given to Mini Course Seminars

September, 1980

BUILDING SELF-ESTEEM IN YOURSELF AND OTHERS

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(Transcript of a talk given to Mini-Course Seminars, October 1980)

INTRODUCTION

When I ask people about what they want to improve in their families, invariably the most frequently mentioned topics are SELF-ESTEEM, self-confidence, love, values, discipline, trust, responsibility, handling peer pressure, and understanding stages of developmental tasks. Self-esteem includes each of these topics in a number of ways, and so I have chosen this topic for two of the seminars to be held at the Unit for Child Studies.

The purpose of this session is to help parents and people in the professions to appreciate themselves better as support persons and to develop and practice skills which will lead to building positive self-esteem both within themselves and others.

One may ask *"Why is positive self-esteem important?"* It is important because when people experience it, they feel confident, they are effective and productive, and they generally respond to other people and themselves in healthy, positive and growing ways. People who have positive self-esteem believe that they are lovable and capable, and they care about themselves and other people. They do not have to build themselves up by criticizing other people or by patronizing less competent people.

Some people confuse positive self-esteem with self-centredness, bragging or feelings of superiority - all of which are attempts to hide negative feelings of self, or a poor self-concept. Before I introduce you to some of the practical skills let me define some terms for you.

WHAT IS SELF CONCEPT?

Self-concept is the consolidation of all the information received from a person's environment - a person's perceptions of how he or she is viewed by others and how he or she sees him or herself. Consequently, environmental and social experiences play a significant role in the building and moulding of a child's self-concept. For example, a child interprets positive reactions to his or her person as I am good and negative reactions as I am not good. Subsequently, he or she integrates the accompanying feelings of worth or worthlessness into his or her self-image. Therefore, when a child says, "That's me!" he or she is referring to the many attitudes, beliefs, values, ideas and perceptions that make up his or her total self-concept (Jersild, A., 1952).

WHAT IS SELF-ESTEEM?

Self-esteem is like self-respect. When I talk about self-esteem I am referring to an individual's personal judgement of worthiness or unworthiness, approval or disapproval that are expressed in the attitudes a person holds towards himself. From Coopersmith's (1967) study of the antecedents of self-esteem he concluded that, prior to middle childhood, the individual forms a general evaluation of his worth, which remains relatively stable over a period of several years. Coopersmith found that persons with high self-esteem view themselves somewhat along the following lines.

> *"I consider myself a valuable and important person, and am at least as good as others of my age and training. I am regarded as someone worthy of respect and consideration ... I'm able to exert an influence upon people and events, partly because I'm able and willing to present and defend those views. I have a pretty definite idea of what I think is right ... and have a fairly good understanding of the kind of person I am. I enjoy new and challenging tasks and don't get upset when things don't go well right off the bat."*
> (Coopersmith, 1976, p. 164)

Specifically, then, how are children encouraged in the direction of high self-esteem? Baumrind (1965) has noted that a combination of parental warmth and firm discipline is likely to produce a self-reliant, buoyant, self-controlled child. Conclusions reached by Coopersmith also support this observation. In *Antecedents of Self-Esteem,* he states that children brought up in an environment structured by definite controlled limits tend to develop more self-esteem than those reared in a more permissive atmosphere. Coopersmith concluded that: "well defined limits provide the child with a basis for evaluating his present performance as well as facilitating comparisons with prior behaviour and attitudes."

Most children, and particularly the learning disabled, need and want the structure of defined goals. Since definite, stated goals eliminate uncertainty and make meeting expectations easier, school and life become more enjoyable.

Self-worth, however, should not be related to achievements or possessions. People with moderate, low or even non-existent levels of self-esteem tend to denigrate themselves and thereby constantly reinforce their low self-concept. When this process is reversed people learn to build themselves up and to work at improving their self-esteem. It therefore becomes possible to maintain and reinforce a high self-concept and level of esteem. Factors associated with self-esteem, on which work has to be done to cause improvement, are self-confidence, sense of identity, expressiveness, assertiveness and relationships.

The following are techniques which we might use now in practical workshop activities. The techniques are relatively simple to learn ... the difficult part is to keep on and on working at them, because it takes time and effort for old habits to become unlearned and for new habits to become automatic. So we might look at ways of offering positive self-esteem and procedures to enhance our own or our children's self-images.

SELF-ESTEEM - A FAMILY AFFAIR

The many people I have met during my research on the topic of *self* express care about their families and their wish of finding better ways or more options for dealing with individual family members and family situations. These sem-

Self-esteem is a family affair, because the family is the first place we learn who we are and observe and practice how to be that way. Therefore, the parenting or nurturing that we give and receive in the family is important. During the formative years of a child's life, the parenting or nurturing and the offering of values are done by the original mother and father, by the new parent in a remarriage, by an adoptive or foster parent, a day-care person, a grandparent, an older sibling and/or that chiquitous new parent, the television set. Whatever the sources, parenting or nurturing is important. It is important for young children because it allows them to live, whether poorly or well. It is important for adults because it effects not only the most obvious parts of their life styles, but also the very core of their beings - their own self-esteem. No matter who we are, while we do whatever we can to make our institutions more supportive and humane and to find new networks to replace extended family ties, we can start, right now, to assess and improve the quality of living experiences we offer to ourselves and the other people in our immediate families.

POSITIVE SELF-ESTEEM

What contributes to positive self-esteem? Jean Illsley Clarke (1978) states: "We build our own brands of self-esteem from four ingredients: *fate, the positive things life offers, the negative things life offers,* and our decisions about how to respond to fate, the positives, and the negatives." *Fate* determines some very important items in our lives - sex, ordinal position, age, ethnic origin, colour - just to mention a few. These cannot be changed and all we can do is to make decisions about them and attempt to make sense of them. We can't control fate or force decisions for others, but what about the other two ingredients of self-esteem: life's positive and life's negative offerings? These are the areas in which adults have great power and opportunity to impact self-esteem. All of the time that children are with us, we set a rich buffet of positive and negative messages or rewards from which children may choose building blocks for their own self image.

POSITIVE OFFERINGS FOR DOING

Positive offerings for being capable and doing well are self-esteem building blocks that each of us needs every day of our lives. They come in great variety. The "You did that well!" message is important, whether it is praise for a baby grasping a block, a comment on the height of the block tower built by an older child, or a remark on how fast the child can knock the tower down again. The messages can be self-esteem building messages if they are delivered in an admiring tone.

"You are capable!" is an important message to offer children at every age. We can express many such messages to the baby, to the toddler, the seven year old or the seventeen year old. You can compliment the seven year old for figuring out what to take with her to play with on the long journey, but commend the seventeen year old for passing her driver's test. These are - "You are capable" messages - the offerings change as the child grows but the message remains the same - "You can do well".

If you count, you will probably find that you can give dozens of "You did well!" messages in a day.

You now might suggest some examples of ways in which you can offer self-

inars encourage people to claim their own strengths and to make their own decisions about appropriate child care, but at the same time the Unit for Child Studies here at the University of New South Wales provides some tools for adults to get their own needs met.

Today we have different kinds of families, they differ in size, ages, varieties and colours. What families have in common, the world around, is that they are the prime group where people learn who they are and how to be that way. Families don't have to look any certain way or do any certain things. They just have to be.

Because we have different kinds of families they offer their members different things. Too often today, we tend to label families. You might like to name some of the labels we place on families. The list might read like this: a good family, a broken family, an ideal family. By what justification can an outsider label a family as a broken family, an ideal family, or even a good family? The family members are the ones to decide whether families are ideal, good, bad, whole or broken. Agencies can offer research, assistance and theory about how families can improve the ways they treat each other. Only the people who live in the families can decide if the families are good or bad or whole or broken, and it is they who can improve the quality of the living experiences they are offering to each other and to themselves at any time.

There are many practical activities that you can do within your own family to improve your child's feelings about himself or herself, and your own feelings about yourself. Throughout, the major references I will be using are: *Glad to be Me* edited by Dr. Peretz Elkins and *Self Esteem: A Family Affair* by Jean Clarke.

In agreement with the latter, I believe that self-esteem is a family affair, but before I proceed, I would like you to analyse the beliefs you personally hold about families.

Take a pencil and paper and spend a few moments on this first activity.

ACTIVITY 1: List your beliefs about families.

Compare your beliefs with those on which this seminar is based. These beliefs are listed for you below.

1. Families are important.
2. The addition of a person is a major event in family life, for example, the birth, the foster care, the adoption, or a remarriage.
3. The loss of a person is a major event in family life, for example the death or the leaving of a person through divorce or separation.
4. Some parts of our culture discount the impact of the addition or loss of a child and the importance of child rearing.
5. Families need a support system, extended families are good support systems.
6. Parents are important people and so are all the other people who care for children.
7. Children are important people and children deserve caring adults whose needs are met.
8. Effective parenting can be learned by adults of any age.
9. Positive self-esteem is important for children and adults.

esteem building messages in your family. I will record them as you present them. The first will relate to Reward Statements for members of your family.

ACTIVITY 2: Reward-Statements for doing well.

Rewards for doing ... start at six months and encourage people of all ages to do well. Examples of some statements follow.

Great, carry on; You do that well; You encourage me to think; Excellent results!; Neat work; Nice job; I like the way you work; I like the way you wear your clothes; You're a good cook; You're a super dad (daughter, son); Thanks for the gift; I like the way you listen; I appreciate your support; I'm proud of the way you did that; Congratulations! I hear you did .....

POSITIVE OFFERING FOR BEING

The positive offering that is equally important to the "You are capable" message that children need to hear is "You are important and lovable just because you exist". This self-esteem building block is a gift that the child does not have to earn. We give the gift when we say: "Hello, I'm glad you come to my house". These and all the other ways - through words, looks, or touch - that we let children know we are glad they were born are very important because these messages reinforce the belief that they are lovable.

Let us try another activity and record other ways in which you are offering self-esteem building messages in your family. Write them down and I will record some of the ones you wish to share with the group.

ACTIVITY 3: Reward-Statements for being.

Rewards for being - start at birth and help people of all ages live!

Statements	*Actions*
I like you	handshake
I love you	using a person's name
I think you're a nice kid	smile
Good afternoon!	a kiss
You are important	a pat
You are unique	listening
It's so good to see you	sharing
Glad you came over	spending time
I enjoy being with you	initiating contact
I thought of you during the day	
Thanks for being you	

NEGATIVE MESSAGES CAN BUILD ESTEEM

Sometimes, adults have to send negative messages to children. Children deserve clear negative messages that tell them how to improve their behaviour. If negative messages attack the child's being or define the child as incapable, they are destructive to self-esteem. "You silly child! You'll never

make it!" invites the child to fail. Properly delivered, negative messages say to the child "I care about you. You are a worthwhile person, and you can learn how to do things better." Saying "Stop that!" or "Don't do that!" or "No, not that way!" does not invite a child to have positive self-esteem. However, a negative message given in a three step manner can. Tell a child specifically what not to do and why and then give an alternative.
1) Don't do that ..... 2) because ..... 3) Do this .....
This three step process lets a child know that he is an important person capable of thinking and of taking care of himself. With both children and adults it is important not to tell what you don't want unless you also tell what you want them to do instead.

ACTIVITY 4:

The next activity are messages about doing badly, which often sound like blaming or accusations. For example, we often say:

"You're late again!"; "You look untidy"; "Another poor mark"; "Clumsy!"

No self-esteem building messages here! Messages about doing poorly can build self-esteem when they honour the other person, show that you care enough to set limits, and invite the person to be a winner. Messages about behaviour that you want changed can be given in a loving way. For example: "Don't do this ..... because you are important." Or they can be given in a respectful way. "Don't do this ... because it may hurt you or someone else, you can figure out a better way to do it." Or these messages can be given in a way that owns feelings. "Don't do this ..... because I don't like it; do this instead." The tone of voice must not be sarcastic but loving or respectful.

In a one-to-one situation you may discuss some of the ways you have encouraged people of all ages to do better. Then to complete this activity you might change these negative messages into alternative encouraging statements.

1) Another F grade .....; 2) You look untidy .....; 3) You forgot my birthday .....; 4) Clumsy! .....; 5) You're late again .....; 6) Stop interfering in my affairs .....

Remember, messages about doing things incorrectly should start at eighteen months and should encourage people of all ages to do better.

"DON'T BE" MESSAGES OR "DON'T BE WHO YOU ARE"

There are two kinds of messages that do not help build positive self-esteem: insincere compliments and "don't be" messages. An insincere compliment is a compliment that starts out feeling good but ends up feeling bad. "You sound good singing that song, as most times you cannot keep in tune" or "That looks good considering you made it". A sincere compliment makes one feel better, and children deserve straight compliments.

The most destructive message we can put on the buffet of life for children to choose from is a "don't be!" message. Who would deliberately say to a child "Don't be!"? But sometimes we carelessly say things that could be interpreted as "don't be" messages by children, such as "Are you back here again today?" or "If it weren't for you I'd still be working", or "We planned to have three children, and now here is our little mistake!" We might say these things without meaning them, but children often interpret our words literally.

Some children determine their self-worth from the decisions they make about their fate and the decisions they make about the positive and negative messages they hear about who they are and what they do, adults can learn to offer a rich buffet of esteem building messages.

ACTIVITY 5: "Don't be" messages should not be given at any age.

Read the list below and note these things are often said without meaning them - but children often interpret our words literally.

Statements: I never had migraines before I had you. If I didn't have children, I would have time to read. I wish you hadn't been born. You could be replaced. Your parents should have used birth control. Get lost. Drop dead. If you hadn't been born, I could have had a career. You were a mistake. We planned to have three children, and then you came along. Go play with knives. Go play on the street. If I hadn't married you, my life would be happy. If you see a stork, hold it; I want to send this baby back. I bet your folks were disappointed when they saw you. Go away! Are you here again?

Actions: Constant ignoring; battering; acting and speaking as if the child were not there when the child is there.

FOUR WAYS OF PARENTING DESCRIPTION

For any situation that requires parenting - advising and supporting, there are four possible ways of responding. Nurturing ways and structuring and protecting ways encourage positive self-esteem and critizing ways tear down self-esteem. Below are situations which I would like you to consider. Each situation has a response given by a nurturing, a structuring and protecting, a soft, depending, and a criticizing parent.

Read each of the four responses to each situation. Allow yourself to hear the positive and the negative implications of each. Rewrite each answer to fit your own value system where needed.

Parent Messages

Nurturing. Gentle. Caring. Supportive. Invites a person to get needs met, offers to help, gives permission to do things well, to change, to win. *AFFIRMS!*

Recognizes and validates the personhood of the other as being important, having strength(s), having the capacity to grow, practising self-control, being self-determining, having goals, being not intentionally hurtful or destructive, being loving and lovable.

Structuring

Assertive. Sets limits. Demands performance. Offers tools. Shows or tells how to do things well, to change to win. *AFFIRMS!*

Supports the other as a growing person who is capable and is building on strengths by offering choices, exploring alternatives and consequences, advo-

cating traditions and ethics, demanding that preferred behaviour be substituted for undesired behaviour, setting conditions so others can be successful, removing obstacles, offering appropriate incentives, telling or showing ways to build skills and providing for practice and feedback, negotiating contracts and goals. Ask people to state what they want or need in a problem situation.

Depending

It sounds supportive but it invites dependence. Gives permisstion to fail. *NEGATES!*

Judges the other as weak and inadequate - lacking strengths, the ability to grow and learn, self-control, self-determination. Blames other people, situations, or fate. Enables self-destructive behaviour and leads the other person to wish for magic. Carries the other person's burden or invites a person to be responsible for other people's feelings.

Criticizing

Ridicules, tears down, shows or tells how to fail. *NEGATES!*

Judges the other as unacceptable by blaming and fault finding, comparing the person with others, using global words. For example: "You always ... " "You never .... " Labelling or name calling, using "why" questions to accuse the other offering no solutions.

Encourages a person to do poorly or to do self-destructive acts. Assumes a person is responsible for other people's feelings. Uses sarcastic or cruel humour.

Situtation 1: Adult says: *"I'm going to attend the Seminar on Self-Esteem, and I don't know if I will find it helpful."*

Nurturing: *"I hope it will be helpful, interesting and enjoyable."*

Dependant: *"Do you have to? I am sure you know all about self. Seminars are usually dull and you don't learn much."*

Structuring & Protecting: *"I trust you have studied the objectives and thought things through, you generally do. You decide on what will be helpful for you."*

Criticizing: *"You shouldn't have to attend a seminar on self. You should automatically know all about yourself and your family."*

Situation 2: Twelve-year-old daughter says: *"I want to stay overnight with my class mate. Her parents have gone away for two days, but her sixteen-year-old brother will be there."*

Nurturing: *"I understand and know you want to have fun with your school friend. She can come here for the night."*

Structuring & Protecting: *"No, you can't stay overnight with your friend unless her parents are home."*

Dependant: *"Well, I really don't think you should, but I suppose just this once would be alright."*

Criticizing: *"No! Of course you can't go! What kind of parents would people think we are. Do you know what sixteen-year-old boys are like?"*

The Four Ways of Parenting exercise is a method of differentiating parenting styles. The person who is using the four ways of parenting can improve his or her parenting skills and sharpen their ability to separate helpful and destructive parenting messages. You have to rember that the *positive* responses are *nurturing* messages and *structuring and protecting* messages, while the destructive ones are *depending* and *criticizing* messages. These exercises can be read or can be role played as adults can improve the quality of positive and negative messages they offer by practising the Four Ways of Parenting Exercise. The first two parenting styles build positive self-esteem. The latter two invite negative feelings about the self. You may wish to plan your own situations or examples and learn to recognize and practice the four methods of parenting - you may substitute your own values and words.

Many people who have used this Four Ways of Parenting practice method have reported that they are able to respond in all four ways but that the ways that are easiest to use are the ways in which they themselves were parented. When you role play the situations it gives you an opportunity to recognize ways in which you have been parenting other people skillfully and to enjoy and to strengthen those ways. If you identify ways you have parenting that you do not wish to continue - the role play offers you an opportunity to practice positive alternatives.

SELF-ESTEEM FOR ADULTS

Parents frequently ask me: "What about positive self-esteem for adults, who builds their self-esteem?" They themselves do! Some of them have already internalized a lot of positive self-esteem. But all adults need to add to that by getting self-esteem messages from other people.

It is the responsibility of adults to get positive self-esteem messages for themselves and to offer them to other adults. How do you build positive self-esteem in adults? In the same ways as you do for children. Give yourself and others positive rewards for being, positive rewards for doing well and appropriate negative rewards for doing badly. Stop giving insincere compliments or any kind of "don't be" messages to yourself and others. When you realize you have said them - take them back - you can always change the message. If "left handed compliments" or "don't be" messages come your way, don't accept them, don't internalize them, don't believe them. It is much easier to improve or change your behaviour when you believe you are lovable and capable.

You can improve now the messages you are receiving about being lovable and capable. For example, let us use the problem that is so expressed to me: *"I think I should be a better parent."* Hear the warm, supportive, nurturing messages. *"You are an important, caring, lovable person and you can improve your ability to parent."*

Hear the strength and the how-to-do-it suggestions in the structuring and protecting messages: *"I expect you to be a nurturing parent. Claim the ways you are doing an important job and identify the areas in which you need to improve. Get help if you need it. You can do it!"*

Hear and reject the destructive gloom and doom projections of the criticizing message: *"You should be worried about being a better parent. What you did yesterday was really silly. You keep that up and your children won't want to have anything to do with you."*

Hear and reject the person who wants you to be dependent and invites you to give up: *"I think you're just fine the way you are. After all, you love your kids, and you did come from a broken family. You couldn't be expected to know as much about parenting as a person from a normal home."*

LOVE YOURSELF, APPRECIATE YOUR ACCOMPLISHMENTS, ACCEPT YOUR MISTAKES, AND CHANGE THEM WITHOUT BEATING ON YOURSELF. FIND SOME OTHER PEOPLE - A SUPPORT GROUP - WHO WILL SWAP THAT KIND OF HEALTHY RELATIONSHIP WITH YOU.

Finally, I have taken some characteristics of a self-accepting person from *Glad to be Me* which may assist you to model self-esteem for your children by keeping your own self-esteem high and by teaching children how to be responsible for their own self-esteem.

SOME CHARACTERISTICS OF A SELF-ACCEPTING PERSON

The self-accepting person is a participant in life rather than a spectator and is inclined to be objective, spontaneous, and emotionally and intellectually honest, and tries to understand the interpersonal and environmental problems to be faced but also accepts their own limitations in gaining true insight concerning them. They also work out the best adjustment to life of which they are capable, often without fully understanding all that is involved.

However, the self-accepting person is willing to experience the pleasures and discomforts of self-revelation: i.e. they accept the mixed pain and joy that accompany each change in attitude and feeling toward themselves and others.

The self accepting person's claims on life are, for the most part, reasonable. If they want to be a meber of the Country Club yet cannot afford it, they find other social and recreational outlets in keeping with their budget.

The self-accepting person without special talent or ability is able to share emotionally in the gifts of others without undue regret about their inborn deficiencies and does not brood about missed opportunities, lost causes, errors, and failure. Rather, they look on them for what they can contribute to their doing things differently or better in the future.

He/she does not get stuck in the rut of irrational feelings of love, hate, envy, jealousy, suspicion, lust, and greed, because they let each feeling spell out its special message for them.

Although the self-accepting person may prefer not to be alone or isolated from family or friends, yet, in special times, when aloneness or isolation is a necessity, he or she can endure lack of contact with their fellows.

The self-accepting person may or may not be conventional in their thinking, feeling, or behaviour. But when they are unconventional, it is not for the purpose of flaunting convention but rather for the sake of expressing or fulfilling a valid personal or public need.

They are not rigidly guided by rules and moralisms but willing to alter values in keeping with new insights.

They grant to others their right to values not identical with their own.

The self-accepting person puts him/herself into life in terms of their highest insights. Yet, accepts the fact that, in its essence, it remains the mystery of mysteries.

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UNIVERSITY OF NEW SOUTH WALES

SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

UNIT FOR CHILD STUDIES

YOUR CHILD'S SELF ESTEEM

Sister Mary Fahey

"The degree to which I can create relationships which facilitate the growth of others as separate persons is a measure of the growth I have achieved in myself."

Carl R. Rogers
Perceiving, Behaving and Becoming

Based on a talk given at Mini-Course Seminars

October, 1980.

BUILDING SELF-ESTEEM IN YOURSELF AND OTHERS

YOUR CHILD'S-SELF ESTEEM

This is the second session to be held on *self-esteem* in this series and is related very much to the concepts I discussed with you in the first seminar held here at the Unit for Child Studies. The purpose of this session is to provide the participants with an opportunity to consider programmes directed to the development of positive attitudes in children. The session will be of particular value to those interested in developing skills and ways of assisting children to develop a true sense of themselves.

SELF CONCEPT

I will once again define some terms for you. When I refer to a child's *self-concept* I am referring to the many attitudes, beliefs, values, ideas, and perceptions the child holds about himself or herself. By *self-esteem* I'll be meaning the degree of favourableness or the degree of positiveness about this *self-concept* and just how positively children view themselves.

THE IMPORTANCE OF SIGNIFICANT OTHERS

In all societies, the nuclear family is the initial unit within which a child's personality is formed and nourished. It is within the context of some kind of family unit that he/she feels loved or unloved, wanted or unwanted, capable or incapable, worthy or unworthy. It is probably safe to say that parents who consciously choose to have children do not deliberately set out to make their children more unhappy than happy, more fearful than adventurous, more close-minded than open-minded, or more neurotic than adjusted. Most parents, in a word, want to give their children the best they can give them.

In spite of good intentions, however, children do not always turn out for the best. Some turn out to be hostile, hateful, and suspicious. Others are chronic complainers, still others are fearful and anxious, and some turn out to be unhappy, shy adults wondering who they are and what they stand for. Although all human relationships are unique, the one existing between a child and his or her parents is an enormously important one. Children are influenced, formed and eventually shaped through a slow process of witnessing and participating in the day-to-day interactions of the people in their lives who are important to them. The intimacy and intensity of contact and the everyday interaction and interchange exist in an emotionally charged atmosphere. Whether children get no attention at all or too much, whether they are punished too often or too little, they are forming attitudes about themselves.

How children are raised, whether by natural parents or someone else, *does* make a difference in terms of how they feel about themselves and other people. Hamachek (1971) writes:

> *"How a child behaves and what he/she becomes depend, in a large measure, on how he/she was reared and the nature of his/her relationship to the adults who were responsible for raising him/her."*

The first day of pre-school or school is a milestone in the lives of children, a day when they begin to forge ahead toward independence in a new environment. Parents and family will no longer be the only primary persons in the child's life. Others - those teachers, friends, and peers whom a child considers significant - begin to influence and affect development of the child's self-concept. If these significant others consider and treat the child as a worthwhile and an important human being, they will help the child develop a positive self-image. I believe the Ancient Chinese Proverb:

"A child's life is like a piece of paper on which every passerby leaves a mark."

SCHOOLING AND SELF-ESTEEM

Pupils differ greatly in interests, abilities, and cultural backgrounds. Pupils mature physically, mentally, emotionally and socially at different rates of speed. They vary in rates of learning and their attitudes toward learning. Success in their work is necessary for their own self-esteem. They should have confidence in their ability to grow. Children must feel that they are understood and appreciated for what they are as well as for what they accomplish.

As I carry out my research on self-esteem with primary school children it is not uncommon to hear children say ...

"I'm no good"

On questioning the children regarding such statements, I find that generally negative experiences have led some children to conclude that they are and will remain of little worth. As a result, often these children see no point in trying to learn new concepts and skills. Despite my efforts to emphasize their full potential, their negative self-image limits their success.

Although studies reveal that positive attitudes can effect changes in a child's negative self-image, the older a child is the more difficult it becomes for him or her to change. Early childhood education is, therefore, a crucial stage and an optimal time for affective learning. For example, the earlier a child learns that failure is not bad in itself, but is rather a natural part of learning and living process, the easier it will become for the child to cope with failure and develop feelings of adequacy that maximize his or her educational success. Or when the message that you are a worthwhile individual permeates and underscores each interaction between teacher and student, feelings of self-worth will develop and eventually be reflected in student attitudes.

Psychological research concerning self-esteem shows strong correlation between a child's self-image and his or her academic success. William Purkey (1970) outlines very clearly such relationships in his book *Self Concept and School Achievement.* He writes:

"In the light of the influence of the self-concept on academic achievement, it would seem like a good idea for schools to follow the precept I saw printed on an automobile drag-strip racing programme: 'Every effort is made to ensure that each entry has a reasonable chance of victory.'"

The research of child psychologist Stanley Coopersmith shows that self-esteem is a better predictor than intelligence test scores of a child's

future academic success. Psychologist William Morse concurs, having found that self-esteem was the better predictor of lower primary students' readiness.

Since self-esteem so strongly influences cognitive growth, I believe parents and teachers should try to create a well-balanced educational environment that helps children develop their full human potential. By cherishing and holding the child in absolute esteem, the parent and teacher are establishing an environment that facilitates growth and becoming.

PARENTS AND TEACHERS - CREATE AN ENHANCING ENVIRONMENT

In *Born to Win*, James and Jongeward (1971) suggest that everyone can be a winner in their own right. Each human being is born as something new, something that never existed before. Children are born with what they need to win at life. Each person in their own way can see, hear, touch, taste, and think for themselves. Each has their own unique potentials - their capabilities and limitations. Each can be a significant, thinking, aware and creatively productive person in their own right - a winner. Now, as parents or teachers we have to maintain a "you can do it" attitude.

Teach children to praise themselves. A child's feelings of adequacy and self-acceptance are central to the success of the whole educational process. When children feel good about themselves, their motivation is higher and they become more involved in everything they do. As a result, they retain and make use of what they learn over a longer period of time.

Since significant others provide the data from which a child derives much of his or her self-perception, teachers can do a great deal in the classroom to help children internalize a positive self-image. If teachers do this, the children will also be successful in their learning. However, in order to catch positive attitudes, children need models to imitate. Be a positive model - parent or teacher - by praising yourself in front of your children. If children often hear you make statements, such as "I did a good job on this work today", they will begin to internalize the positive value judgement. No cheating though! Children also need to learn that their models make mistakes. If you have done a poor job, admit it by saying, for example, "I surely did not organize myself well today".

I find children with negative self-images really don't know how to speak positively. You'll need to help, see and feel their successes. Whenever success occurs, I help the child verbalize the success. You try it and you will find that the making of positive statements will become more automatic. With continued support and reinforcement, the child will internalize a positive attitude.

ALL-ABOUT-ME ACTIVITIES - POSITIVE SUPPORT TECHNIQUES

Self-esteem increases in an environment that provides opportunities for growth and success. As a significant other for the children in your family (or for children in your class) you greatly affect whether such opportunities are present. However, since the children themselves are often significant others for each other, they also greatly influence the self-esteem building quality of their environment.

There are a variety of ways to enhance the level of communication you have with your children, to learn more about each other and to help your children develop a realistic and positive confidence in themselves. The following are activities designed to help children recognize their own unique-

ness and to value themselves in such a way as to promote self-esteem. (These activities and similar ones may be found in the texts *100 Ways to Enhance Self-Concept in the Classroom*, a handbook for teachers and parents by Jack Canfield and Harold Wells (1976), and *Self-Esteem: A Classroom Affair*, by Michele and Craig Borba (1978), and *Glad to be Me*, edited by Peretz Elkins (1976).

DEVELOPING PHYSICAL AWARENESS

Charting the physical growth of primary school children draws attention to their appearance and helps them see how their bodies are developing. When children feel good about their bodies, they also tend to feel good about themselves psychologically and socially. However, children often equate physical growth with personal worth. Help them to understand that self-worth is not dependent on physical size. This can be done through such techniques as:

1. *Making a growth chart.* (Record your child's growth in height on a chart posted in an easily visible place. Print the title - "I AM GROWING!" at the top of the chart. Measure and mark the children's height at regular intervals.)

2. *Making a picture time line by observing growth.* (Write a title on the top of a chart "HAVE I CHANGED?". Then divide the paper into four vertical sections and label them ME as a Baby; ME a Year Ago; ME Now and ME Later.) Have the children draw pictures or illustrate each section with snapshots of themselves. Also encourage children to write or dictate incidents experienced or hoped for during each of these time spans.

3. *"ME" prints.* In order to emphasize children's uniqueness, have each child convert a self-portrait into a finger-print. (Let the child use bright coloured paints to cover the entire surface of a large sheet of white art paper with a free-form fingerpainting. While finger painting is wet, have the child use a paddle-pop stick to scratch out a picture of his or her face. On another sheet of art paper - the child gently places this sheet over the fingerpainting, matching the sides and lightly rubbing over the entire sheet of paper. When the sheets are separated, the child will see a print of his or herself on the second sheet). After the print is dry, ask the child to look at him or herself in the mirror and compare that image with the one on the print.

4. *Mirror Drawings.* Children require a great deal of time to become aware of the various parts of their bodies and of how these are proportioned. Since children can rarely resist looking at themselves in a mirror, having a full length mirror in their room will help them develop physical self awareness. Encourage mirror usage by having the children make mirror drawings.

5. *"ME" - Paper or Rag Dolls.* Self-awareness is an integral component of self-concept. Young children can develop physical self-awareness by making and displaying replicas of themselves. The dolls will help them notice, think about, and increase appreciation for their own physical characteristics. Help the children observe objectively. If they exaggerate or caricature certain traits, elicit their feelings about those traits. Acknowledge negative feelings about awkward traits or physical handicaps but encourage the children to concentrate on changing what is changeable.

6. *Silhouette Pictures.* Children generally love one-of-a-kind items. Capitalize on this value judgement by making silhouette pictures to draw attention to children's individuality. This can be done by asking the child to stand in front of an overhead projector, trace the silhouette that appears on the wall onto a piece of black paper. The silhouette is then cut out and pasted on white drawing paper and mounted on cardboard. Vary this activity by making silhouette collages. Have the children find self-descriptive pictures or words in old magazines, cut out the pictures or words, and paste them onto the silhouettes.

EMPHASIZING CHILDREN'S STRENGTHS

Everyone likes to hear and feel that he or she is good at something. However, children with negative self-images do not often hear positive statements about themselves. Children with low self-esteem may not even realize that they have characteristics to be proud of. Or they may actually not have developed any strengths to feel good about. Since strengths develop first in areas of interest, collect information about your children's interests. Keep a paper and pencil handy to note interests you hear children talk about. Take note of the things children proudly show you. Point out and emphasize children's strengths so they will be aware of their positive attributes. Say for example, *"Mary, did you know that you are a good tennis player?"* Have children do the following activities.

What-I-Can-Do Books

Having children make books that emphasize what they can already do will strengthen each child's sense of accomplishment and self-worth. Begin by giving children pages to make a book, a cover might be designed by them and print the title: WHAT I CAN DO. Tell the children to write on each page of their books a sentence stating one thing they do well. Have them begin each sentence with "I can ..... "

Writing Other Books

Extend this activity by having your children write other books. They are experts on many topics, such as favourite toys, favourite books, favourite school activities, their wishes for the present and the future, their feelings. These and many other activities you can get children to do, such as making -

Favourite Activities Mobiles
Hobby Displays
All-About-Me and My-Feelings Book
Our Discovery Book - Discoveries about Self and Others
Friendship Circles
Lists - What is Important to Me?
Feelings Thermometer .... I feel ...
Award Circles
Puppets - fantasy world to identify emotions, increase self-awareness and develop self confidence
Set Goals - encourage realistic progress
Keep Records
Motor Progress Charts
Reading Progress Tapes

Games - Self-Awareness

The following three circle activities develop self-awareness and feelings of self-worth by requiring children to decribe themselves positively.

(1) *I'M GLAD TO BE ME:* Using puppets as props for an I'm Glad To Be Me circle. Begin the circle by having the first child say, "I'm glad to be me because .... ". The next child then looks at his or her neighbour and says "_____, you are glad to be you because ..., and I'm glad to be me because ....." (Repeating their neighbour's statements helps the children think of themselves in relation to other people). Repeat the process until all the children have participated.

(2) *I'M GREAT:* A child might mimic he's the Lion and roar gently. I'm GREAT because ..... and completes the sentence.

(3) *MIRROR, MIRROR:* Use a hand mirror, as the object is to pass it in a circle. Have each child look into the mirror and then repeat the following verse:

Mirror, mirror in my hand,
Tell me why I'm the best child in the land.

After the child gives one reason why he or she is the best child in the land, have him or her pass the mirror to the person on his or her right.

AWARENESS OF OTHERS

Extend self-awareness to awareness of others by adapting the above activities only using the following:

People Riddles: On a 6 cm x 10 cm card, have each child draw a self-portrait, sign his or her name, and place the card on a bulletin board or in a pocket chart. During the People Riddles make a circle, invite each child to make up a riddle to go with his or her self portrait. For example:

I am a girl. I live in a brick house.
I like to play school.
I draw well. I like swimming.
WHO AM I?

Fold the riddles and put them into a hat. Then have each child draw a riddle out of the hat and have a volunteer begin the circle activity by reading the riddle he or she drew. Ask the other children to guess which friend the riddle is about. Have the child indicate his or her guess by pointing to the appropriate self-portrait. When the guess is correct, tell him or her to pin the riddle to the board under the matching self-portrait card or to slip it into the appropriate pocket on the pocket chart. Then, ask the child who guessed correctly to read the next riddle.

GENERAL SUGGESTIONS FOR POSITIVE ORIENTATIONS

The following are some suggestions useful in both the home and the classroom for helping children attain a positive orientation to themselves.

Realistically assess strengths and assist the child in becoming aware of his/her assets.

When it is necessary to correct or discipline a child, do so individually, never in front of others.

Call attention to a child's strengths not only individually but also before others.

Establish an environment in which children are genuinely respected, in which they are heard, their ideas are tried, and they have opportunities to share in real responsibilities, not tasks created to keep them busy.

Establish a permissive atmosphere which encourages the shy and withdrawn children to participate and which gives them the freedom to express themselves openly. The classroom environment should be under continual examination.

Methods of developing feelings of adequacy in the child through encouragement, love and guidance should be utilized at all levels, and particularly in the primary school grades.

Parents should be helped to recognize that each child is unique and functions in terms of his or her self-concept. Ways to create better relationships between parents and children should be devised so that true understanding is promoted.

Avoid abnormally dependent relationships with one or two socially isolated children by integrating them into a group. Accept them, but don't adopt them.

Group participation rather than individual exhibition of skills in important for the isolated child.

Look, nevertheless, for opportunities for the isolated child to help another successfully in a skill, game or school subject.

With concern and consideration, evaluate the suggestions of class members in helping the isolated child toward better adjustment.

The development of at least one mutual friendship is exceedingly important. An equal relationship rather than an unequal, dependent one should be encouraged.

Solicit the help of the parents in developing friendships by suggesting that they include other children in family activities and trips.

Attempt to develop in the child a willingness to accept help from others.

Lastly, and most important, children's feelings for others are determined by their feelings toward themselves. Help them to accept and care for themselves, their school work, and others.

POSITIVE SUPPORT TECHNIQUES FOR TEACHERS

One of the questions often asked by teachers regards the relationship of self-concept to the learning of subject matter. The research literature is filled with reports indicating that cognitive learning increases when self-concept increases. The data supporting this conclusion is quite extensive and overwhelming. Read, for example, *Self-Concept and School Achievement*

(1970) by William Purkey, for a comprehensive review of the research.

In a large measure, most of our anxiety about the large number of unhappy and unsuccessful students in our schools is derived from a contemporary over-emphasis on intellectual growth to the exclusion of the personal - social side of development. Although I know it sounds old fashioned to talk about the "whole child" and "tender loving care", I strongly believe that most problems in child rearing and education could be avoided if the adult's concern for a child's achievement as a student were balanced by an equally strong concern for his or her feelings of self-worth as a person.

As I stated earlier, self-esteem increases in an environment that provides opportunities for growth and success. In the *Authentic Teacher*, Clark Moustakas capsulizes my conviction.

> *"By cherishing and holding the child in absolute esteem, the teacher is establishing an environment that facilitates growth and becoming."*

School-Enhanced Activities: Include the entire staff and school in self-image building activities in order to help children develop positive attitudes towards the world outside their classrooms.

At the beginning of each school year, take extended walks within the school building. Invariably, touring upper-grade rooms starts children thinking about the future.

Select a staff-member-for-the-week and have the children interview that person about his or her job. Be sure to include people in non-teaching and non-administrative roles, for example, secretaries, canteen workers, gardeners, etc. Remember staff members whom you honour with thank-you notes, pictures, or other mementos.

Invite the Principal to visit frequently in your classroom, to chat with the children, or to do a special lesson.

Invite older children to assist you by providing cross-age tutoring.

Have special achievers visit another classroom to share their accomplishments.

Invite another class to visit your classroom. During the visit, point out special projects that have stimulated positive actions in your classrooms.

Since the activities and suggestions I have described can be used with children of many ages in a wide range of situations, the teacher who constantly seeks ways to adapt the material and suggestions will reap the greatest benefit from them.

Finally, activities and events that develop self-awareness and build self-esteem are well worth remembering. The following is a summarized list which you may develop and practice.

POSITIVE SUPPORT TECHNIQUES

1. *Positive Feedback:* Students often wish to give each other some feedback or other data about themselves. Some beginning statements for giving feedback in a positive manner include:

It helped me when you .....

I liked when you ....

When you ..... I .....

We were better as a group today because you .....

Positive Support: Ask each student to list and later to share, five things that another person can say, do, or recognize in them that makes them feel good or successful. For example:

1. Smile when you see me
2. Listen to me when I talk
3. Tell me that my contribution was useful
4. Hug or kiss me to show affection
5. Tell me that you missed me while I was gone

Positive Sharing: At some time during the week, suggest that the students make "I appreciate ....." statements to each other. This activity can be done in the whole class, in small groups, or individually at home.

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2. *Keep a journal.* It allows the children to keep an ongoing account of how they are growing and what is happening to them, of how they uniquely respond to a given situation. It provides a cumulative statement of who they are, how they see themselves, and how others see them. The more a person learns about themselves the more they will expand the concept of themselves. Ask students to write explicitly "I learned ....." statements.

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3. *WHO AM I?* Ask students to respond to this question and build up an autobiographical questionnaire, e.g.: List ten words that describe you best.

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4. *Sharing:* Divide a group into pairs. Instruct each to carry on a normal conversation for a few minutes, each person telling the other as much as possible about themselves. Suggest that each one tell some things which they think are important to share. Then, in a large group, each person introduces his or her partner by name and the one special thing that impressed them as most important about that person.

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5. *Success Sharing:* To help students focus on positive aspects of themselves is to have them publicly share their accomplishments with the group. Ask them to share a success they had between the ages of ten and fifteen, then between fifteen to the present time. A variation of this is to periodically ask your children to share their greatest success or accomplishment during a recent period of time - the past week, month, weekend or holiday.

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6. *Bragging Line - Pride Line:* Exercises such as the Pride Line or Bragging Line provide a legitimate forum for disclosing those things about one's self that are positive and growth promoting. Ask the students to form groups of five or six. Tell them that each person has five minutes to boast about anything they feel like in their life: accomplishments,

awards, skills, things they do well, personal characteristics, etc. Or ask a student to make a specific statement about a specific area of behaviour, beginning with "Im proud that I ..... "

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7. *Self Worth:* Have the children write a story about something they can do to make other people feel worthy.

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8. *My Assets:* Ask the children to write a paragraph about themselves describing the assets they have, the negative traits they would like to eliminate, and the positive characteristics they would like to obtain or develop. In dealing with the negative aspects, it is important to distinguish between things that can be changed (a bad disposition) and things that cannot be changed (a long chin).

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9. *Teaching:* Ask students to share with the class one area in which they feel confident enough to teach another person - a hobby, skills, a sport etc.

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10. *Making Contact:* Virginia Satir writes:

"I believe
the greatest gift
I can conceive of having
from anyone
is
to be seen by them,
to be understood
and
touched by them.
The greatest gift
I can give
is
to see, hear, understand
and to touch
another person.
When this is done
I feel
contact has been made."

If there is a map for making contact it would contain the following parts:

INVITING first of all, someone to make contact with you. "I have something to tell you, are you ready to hear it?"

ARRANGING yourself in a physical position as to be at eye level, that is seated.

BEING PREPARED to take risks for bringing your insides outside.

MAKING YOUR STATEMENTS beginning with "I". "I am "angry" instead of "You make me angry."

ASKING QUESTIONS for information you do not have.

THINKING of all difficulties as opportunities for creating new possibilities.

(*Making Contact*, Virginia Satir, Celestial Arts, Millbrae, California, 1976)

One could go on and on describing activities and ideas, but I suggest you adopt or adapt any of these activities that will help you in the creation of learning environments that are positive, caring, supportive and growth promoting.

I am convinced that one of the major challenges to teachers and parents is the creation of a self-enhancing learning environment. Some special people seem to do this quite naturally out of their own authentic being and their commitment to others. Most of us, however, benefit from specific, usable suggestions that help us toward that end. It is in that spirit that this session was planned.

We are constantly reminded that each child is a precious human being with great potential. To develop this potential, children need to challenge their abilities and their limits, to hear praise for their accomplishments and to feel accepted by the people with whom they daily work and learn. As parents and teachers we want to be part of this challenge, praise and acceptance so each child with whom we live or work will develop a more positive self-concept. I hope these ideas and activities make it easier for you to join us in this work - in helping children develop a true sense of themselves as lovable and capable human beings.

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October, 1980.

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